

Reflections on the 2007 COEO Conference

by Bryan Grimwood

For the 2007 conference COEO aimed to harness enthusiasm for the recent research summary publication by using the report's title, *Reconnecting Children Through Outdoor Education*, as the conference theme. Hosted by YMCA Wanakita in Haliburton on September 28–30, the event was situated in a camp-like setting, familiar to many long-serving members and a new retreat for others.

The conference kicked off with a Friday evening slideshow and social, as members united with good friends, colleagues and enthusiasts of the beloved out-of-doors!

Saturday's program began with early morning optional activities, with some folks out in a canoe, tranquil among the morning mist, while others awakened their rested limbs with a morning jog or yoga sequence. Others rambled weary to the kitchen for that essential first cup of morning black gold. Following a delicious and bountiful breaky (a BIG thanks to the Wanakita kitchen staff for their great efforts in wonderful food preparation throughout the weekend) conference attendees ventured off to a variety of presentation options.

I sat in on Bob Henderson's discussion of his newly released book, *Nature First: Outdoor Life the Friluftsliv Way*, a compilation of essays focused on the Norwegian cultural characteristic of *meeting* nature in daily life. I spent my afternoon with five other fire-building enthusiasts, sharing ideas about how the friction fire can be used for creating connectedness among children during outdoor education programs. We got our hands dirty, scavenged for firewood, and practiced our bow-and-drill fire starting technique. One of the most memorable moments for me followed this session when four of us seemingly had nowhere to be and no desire to go anywhere, and were intent on enjoying the warming sunshine, the breeze coming off the lake, and

continuing our practice of the ancient fire-building skill. Wonderful.

Saturday night's festivities began with Jessica Lax, founder of the Otesha Project, engaging the COEO audience with an inspirational account of how their cycling, awareness and consciousness raising expeditions were fertilized in magical moments and by compassionate people. Next, the hillbilly punk musical trio, *The Stables* (www.myspace.com/hercomethestables), played a foot stomping 90-minute session that got lively COEO members up on the dance floor. The social continued out at the beachfront campfire with more guitars, voices and camaraderie.

On Sunday morning, Grant Linney guided us through a plenary session, highlighting key findings of the research summary publication. Shane Kramer then called the Annual General Meeting to order. Good news and good business for the COEO crowd.

Reflecting on the theme of the event, I realized that "reconnecting children" does not necessarily equate to reconnecting those under a prescribed age. Reconnecting children refers to engaging the *child* that lives within us all with meaning, experience, community and the forces that sustain us.

With that in mind, I applaud the 2007 conference planning committee and attending COEO delegates for their hard work, enthusiasm and devotion to making this year's conference a success. The 2008 conference planning committee is already at work, aiming to build the momentum and energy of the reconnected 2007 conference crew.

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